

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 20, 2023

The Honorable Janet Yellen
Secretary
Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue NW,
Washington, DC 20220

The Honorable Denis McDonough
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretaries Yellen and McDonough,

Thank you for your hard work and dedication to our nation and its veterans. We applaud the VA's ongoing commitment to increasing the quality and accessibility of patient care. However, we have recently been made aware of an issue that is causing constituents in our home states difficulties in managing their VA Beneficiary Travel Pay reimbursements.

Currently, veterans who receive travel pay reimbursements via direct deposit are unable to reconcile travel claim payments with their bank statements. Many of our nation's veterans have complex health conditions and require numerous medical appointments each month. When veterans receive multiple reimbursements on varying timelines, it is difficult for them to determine the status of each individual claim. One veteran in Vermont has as much as \$800 in unpaid claims at any one time. Without a claim number to track payment, it is not possible to accurately account for which claims have been paid and which have not. According to the Veterans Health Administration, those who file a claim online should see payment in three to five business days, and those who file other ways should see a payment in 45 days. However, in Washington state, which is home to over 112,000 rural veterans, many are waiting over four months to receive their travel reimbursement. Our veterans deserve much better, especially when they are simply trying to receive the benefits they have earned.

Though the Beneficiary Travel Self Service System (BTSSS) offers veterans a modern digital tool to make travel payment claims, it does not assign a unique identifier for claims that follow payments to veterans' bank accounts. Current payments are identified on bank statements as "ACH DEPOSIT, 36 TREAS 310 MISC PAY" followed by an 11-digit number that does not correspond to any claim confirmation received by our constituents.

Veterans who rely on this and other VA programs should have an easy way to ensure that they are receiving the benefits they are owed. The Bureau of Fiscal Services Green Book indicates that ACH payments are initiated by the authorizing federal agencies. Additionally, Chapter Two

section D states that “payment entries may be accompanied by a PPD addenda record (PPD+) which further identifies the reason for the payment.”¹

In order to ensure an improved user experience and process, we ask that you answer the following questions by January 15, 2024.

1. How can veterans currently track individual beneficiary travel reimbursements after they have filed the initial claim?
2. Which agency bears responsibility for determining what information is included in the Prearranged Payment and Deposit (PPD) or PPD+?
3. Are VA and Treasury considering implementing a numerical identification system that veterans can use to track their individual claims and associated payments?

We also respectfully request a briefing for our staff within two weeks of receipt of this letter.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. If you have any questions, please reach out to our staff Essam_Attia@sanders.senate.gov and Ashley_Davis@aging.senate.gov.

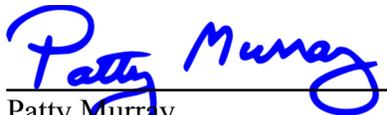
Sincerely,



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



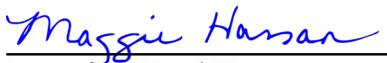
Mike Braun
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator

¹ U.S. Department of Treasury, Bureau of the Fiscal Service, “Green Book – A Guide to Federal Government ACH Payments,” pp. 2-7. January 2021, <https://fiscal.treasury.gov/files/reference-guidance/green-book/greenbook-full.pdf>.